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U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Office of the Secretary

For immediate release

I can't think of any group that I would rather talk with about trends and opportunities in natural resources management than yours.

In America's 2,950 soil and water conservation districts, located in every state, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, you influence management trends -- you create conservation opportunities.

I know about district capabilities from first-hand experience; I am a long-time member of the Roseau Soil and Water Conservation District in Minnesota, and my father was a member of its board of supervisors for many years.

Your efforts, together with those of professional conservationists of the Soil Conservation Service and other federal and state agencies, have been responsible for putting more real conservation on the land than any other program I know of.

I know about NACD capabilities -- and I believe that Dave Unger's long experience with you will make him an outstanding member of our USDA policy team.

Conservation districts and USDA have several new opportunities to participate jointly in shaping the future of resource conservation programs in this country.

Your first opportunity arises through two companion laws -- the Resources Planning Act of 1974, or RPA; and the Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act of 1977, or RCA.

Together these laws direct USDA to complete a total assessment of America's basic surface resources of soil, water, forests, and rangelands.

--They call for a continuing appraisal of trends in resource use and the short-term and long-term resource needs of the Nation.

--They provide that you and other organizations and individuals can contribute to the formation of policy and needed conservation programs.

--They call for 5-year programs based on the resource appraisals or assessments.

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Remarks prepared for delivery by Secretary of Agriculture  
Bob Bergland to Spring Board of Directors meeting, National  
Association of Conservation Districts, March 20, 1978,  
Washington, D.C. 607

--They will help answer crucial questions about the future direction of the programs we administer: Are we getting the best possible technical assistance for our conservation tax dollar? Are we sure there will be adequate soil, water, range, and timber resources to meet the needs of future generations? These are the kinds of practical questions that you and associations like yours -- at local, state, and national levels -- need to help us answer.

The first program based on the assessment of Forest Service activities was developed during 1975. Another RPA assessment and program are scheduled for 1980.

Under the newer Resources Conservation Act, the Soil Conservation Service will conduct field hearings on its first appraisal and program in spring 1979 and prepare a final version by fall for the President to transmit to Congress at the end of the year.

The more deeply your districts are involved in developing these appraisals and programs; the more useful and responsive our programs will be.

I hope you will help us to evaluate how well these multi-year programs meet their aims, and suggest needed shifts or needed legislation; and help organizations and individual citizens add their ideas.

Our programs under RPA and RCA will never be "final"...they will always be open to improvement. You are close to America's rural citizens. We need your judgment in moving our conservation programs in the right directions.

Your second opportunity is through other new laws relating to water resources:

--The Clean Water of 1977 directs USDA to begin a Rural Clean Water Program, and authorizes several hundred million dollars over the next two fiscal years to support it. I have assigned lead agency responsibility to the Soil Conservation Service for this program, and they will call on you to help administer it.

You helped prove that soil and water conservation practices are the "best management practices" for reducing sediment and many other water pollutants. You helped demonstrate that cost-sharing incentives and technical assistance can encourage voluntary conservation.



--The Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 gives USDA and conservation districts roles in restoring old abandoned mines; in making sure new mining is done with more concern for the environment, and in keeping special watch over prime agricultural lands. President Carter has signed a supplemental appropriation of \$5 million for the rural abandoned mine reclamation effort, and the proposal for 1979 is \$10 million. Two weeks ago we held five public meetings across the country on the program. Response was heartening.

Conservation districts have helped landowners do something about surface mining scars for 3 decades or more -- now we have a new chance and some authority and cost-sharing dollars to go with it.

--The Food and Agriculture Act of 1977 -- the farm bill -- assigns aquaculture authority to USDA.

We have just scratched the surface of this promising area of food production -- mainly some trout farms in the north and catfish farms in the south. In several other countries though, aquaculture is an important source of protein -- it includes much more than "fish farming."

We believe that an aquaculture industry will grow in importance in the years ahead -- to produce food and provide more alternatives in waste management.

USDA agencies can study the industry, develop the technology, educate specialists and landowners and lend technical and financial aid. You can help with careful resource management.

Your third major opportunity has to do with land use.

Nearly everything about USDA, from rural development to private forestry to soil and water conservation, relates to land use.

We believe better coordination of our efforts can make us more effective in encouraging better land use. We have revived the Department-wide Land Use Committee to do this.

We recognize that the primary responsibilities for land use policy planning and regulation rest with local and State governments. But USDA information and assistance programs can help those governments meet the expectations of our people for food, fiber, environmental protection and community and rural development.

We need your close partnership in providing this assistance and your strong advocacy, particularly on issues of prime agricultural and forest land.

U.S. population has risen by 100 million in the past fifty years, and some project another 150 million increase in the next half-century.

Yet at least three million acres of productive rural land are taken out of production for other uses each year.

That's a collision course with disaster.

The Carter Administration places high priority on managing agricultural and forest lands for optimum contribution to overall national needs.

For example, the roadless and undeveloped areas in the National Forests offer a wealth of opportunities for both additional wilderness and many other uses.

The Forest Service attempted six years ago to set priorities for studying these roadless and undeveloped areas, in a review called RARE.

Many people were dissatisfied with the tentative classification given to some roadless areas. Many land management plans were taken to court. Many "piecemeal" legislative designations of wilderness were proposed. The use of these valuable lands was tied up in arguments over what use was best. I believe these lands are too valuable to be left unused while we take years to decide their ultimate allocation.

When I became Secretary of Agriculture, we started RARE II to settle the controversy.

RARE II aims to speed the allocation of National Forest roadless and undeveloped areas for wilderness and non-wilderness uses.

Some 66 million acres of roadless and undeveloped areas are now being evaluated. Some people look at the total acreage and assume that most of it will be recommended as wilderness. That's not correct.

RARE II's purpose is to determine which roadless areas are of the high quality needed to round out the National Wilderness Preservation System. And we also want to determine which of these areas should no longer be considered for wilderness -- so they can be managed for non-wilderness uses. We will ask Congress to affirm our recommendations.

Results of the RARE II evaluation will be announced in early June for public review and comment. I urge conservation districts to express their concerns to their closest national forest supervisors. The regional forester can provide copies of the draft environmental statement. Your comments and others will be considered promptly. We plan to wrap up our analyses and forward our recommendations through the President to Congress in January 1979.

Your support of this systematic approach to public land use allocation will be appreciated.

Let me close by saying how much I appreciate the assistance that NACD has given our department over the years. Without that help we wouldn't be the premier resource agency that we are today. Together we've accomplished a great deal.

--With your help the Soil Conservation Service has assisted more than 2.2 million private landowners with conservation on more than 780 million acres.

--SCS has finished soil surveys on more than 1.4 billion acres and published surveys for a third of the country.

--The P.L. 566 program is assisting communities in a thousand small watersheds to prevent floods, increase local water supply, and provide recreation and fish and wildlife habitat.

--In other resource management, the Forest Service directly protects and manages more than 187 million acres of forests and associated rangelands, and operates the world's largest forestry research organization.

--National Forest System lands provides half of the total recreational use provided by all federal lands -- more than the combined recreational use of lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service, and the Fish and Wildlife Service.

--Cooperative forestry programs of the Forest Service influence the actions of states and private forest landowners on 574 million acres of non-Federal land.

--The Agricultural Conservation Program of the Agricultural Conservation and Stabilization Service has provided cost-sharing funds since 1936 totaling about \$8 billion -- and farmers and ranchers have matched this total. That's \$16 billion for soil and water conservation practices.

--The newly organized Science and Education Administration (SEA) oversees multi-million dollar programs in state and federal soil and water conservation research.



--The Extension arm of SEA has established a natural resources program staff to provide informal education for the public on the needs of fish and wildlife.

In all, eight USDA agencies play important roles in natural resources conservation and management. They assist with this vital work on the privately-owned lands of the country and a large share of the publicly-owned lands as well. You have supported these agencies, and I encourage constructive criticism from you.

There is a logic to the way the Department of Agriculture is organized today. All our agencies are interrelated and mutually supportive.

The responsibilities of our Department begin with soil, water and forestry research and management and continue through the production of the food and fiber grown with those resources, processing and inspection, all the way to delivery to the consumer, through a marketing system that assures safety and quality. This is as logical an organization of related activities as anyone can imagine. It ties together the products of the land and the resources that produce them with the people that consume them. And its extension and assistance programs are available in every one of the Nation's 3,000 counties.

That is the experience and the opportunity makes ours a very satisfying partnership.

Thank you very much.





